

dictionary by cicadas

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Bullying, F/M, Gen, Rated for swearing

Language: English

Characters: Dustin Henderson, Eleven (Stranger Things), Lucas Sinclair, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Mike Wheeler

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Summary:

el learns new words, slowly.

some circumstances aren't as nice as others.

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slice of life.

el learns 'cussing'.

dictionary

She hears 'whore' for the first time in freshman year of high school.

There are girls circling around her, and she knows they want to poke and prod and tease. She knows they won't. Won't ever go too far, make her too angry, just in case she fights back. (She knows they're afraid of her. No smile and dark eyes).

"You're a whore, we all know it. Hanging around with Byers and Wheeler and Sinclair. We heard Wheeler hid a girl in his basement when zombie boy was missing. What was he doing with her down there? Does he do the same to you?" One girl says. Her hair is mud-coloured, and her eyes are the same. She has eyeliner smudged under her lower lashes and the gloss on her lips glints when she speaks.

Boys, she thinks. This has to do with boys. (In her head the word is synonymous with 'friend' and 'kind' and 'home' and 'good'. It's 'Man' that scares her. It's 'Man' that is bad.

Her own hair is in a ponytail and her lips are also glossed, but not as shiny - Hop wouldn't let her out with that much on. Maybe that's what made her a-

"Little newbie whore, hanging with the A/V nerds. There's a lot of better choices at this school, and you go for them?" Another girl, lower voice. Meaner. Bitter. "Pathetic."

El feels power in in her fingernails. In her palms, wringing her wrists. She cracks her knuckles and says, "Max. Max is my friend. She's a girl."

The ring around her laughs all at once, like an echo.

"Max Mayfield? That dyke doesn't count." The same girl says. El figures her as the leader.

"Say it" she says, and El frowns.

"Max?" She says, and doesn't understand (why, she doesn't understand why). She doesn't understand, and there's no-one here to explain. No-one here is a friend.

The girl laughs, though it sounds like a grunt. "No, say you're a whore. We want to hear you say it."

El shakes her head. The ponytail hits her ears as she does. It's prickly with the hairspray Joyce gave her.

"Come on, just say it. Say 'I'm a whore' and we'll leave you alone" another says. Blue eyeshadow, pink nails.

El balls her hand into a fist and *tries*, she tries so so hard. Her breathing comes in short bursts through her nose and she just wants to be normal here she doesn't need this.

She feels the build of power under her skin and wills it away, uses her breathing to snuff it out like fire.

The hand gripping her textbooks - '*Jane Hopper*' neatly labelled on each one - tightens, then loosens. The word is bad. Something she does not want to be. A Swear. She's heard it said before but never to her face, never while she's cornered in the girl's bathroom beside the science labs.

El just wants Mike.

"Say it!" The first girl yells, and shoves El's shoulder. It bumps against the white tile of the bathroom wall and she wants to cry.

El speaks slowly, hating, hating.

"I'm a whore." Her voice is gravel. Her body aches. She wants to hurt them and doesn't, and it hurts her instead.

The girls laugh and the leader smiles and they leave when the bell rings seconds later.

El slides her back down the wall, curls her arms around her knees, and cries.

She explains it to Mike, later, when he meets her after school and passes her the notes Max took for her in social studies.

She explains, and Mike just hugs her and whispers into her hair (her own hair, grown, pretty)

"You're not. You're not, El. You're not".

And she hugs back, and listens, and believes Because he's Mike, and he knows.

He knows her better than anyone.